

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Ralph Bunche High School

other names/site number VDHR File No. 048-5007

2. Location

street & number 10139 James Madison Highway not for publication

N/A

city or town King George vicinity X

state Virginia code VA county King George code 099 Zip 22485

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally X statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official

Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register

 See continuation sheet.

 determined eligible for the National Register

 See continuation sheet.

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 removed from the National Register

 other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceRalph Bunche High School
King George County, Virginia

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
☒ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)Cat: EDUCATION Sub: School**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)Cat: GOVERNMENT Sub: Government office

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)MODERN MOVEMENT**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
roof SYNTHETICS: Rubber; METAL: Tin
walls BRICK; CONCRETE
other WOOD: Weatherboard; METAL: Steel
STONE: Granite

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

(Rev. 10-90)

U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceRalph Bunche High School
King George County, Virginia**8. Statement of Significance****Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☒ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)EDUCATION; ETHNIC HERITAGE: Black; SOCIAL HISTORY**Period of Significance** 1947-1968**Significant Dates** 1949**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A**Cultural Affiliation** N/A

Architect/Builder Samuel N. Mayo (architect)
Howard-Mitchell Construction Company (builders)
John J. Ballentine, Jr. (architect for 1957 addition)

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)**9. Major Bibliographical References****Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)**Previous documentation on file** (NPS)

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

(Rev. 10-90)

U. S. Department of the Interior
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King George County, Virginia

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☒ Other State agency – Virginia Department of Education
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources**10. Geographical Data**Acreage of Property 7.8 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>18</u>	<u>313059</u>	<u>4238118</u>	2	<u> </u>
<u> </u> See continuation sheet.					

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Marcus R. Pollard, Historian
Organization: Commonwealth Preservation Group date November 28, 2005
street & number: P. O. Box 4266 telephone 757-923-1900
city or town Suffolk state VA zip code 23439

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps** A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Dr. Candace F. Brown, Superintendent of King George County Schools
street & number 9100 St. Anthony's Rd., P.O. Box 1239 telephone 540-775-5833
city or town King George state VA zip code 22485

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Ralph Bunche High School is located at 10139 James Madison Parkway (Route 301) in Edgehill, King George County, Virginia. The one-story brick building, constructed in 1949 as a high school for the African-American students in King George County, replaced the King George Training School for Negro students which was built in 1916 and demolished circa 1970; traces of the Training School remain in place. The new school was designed by architect Samuel N. Mayo and the construction was completed by Howard-Mitchell Construction Company, both of Richmond.¹ The brick school building rests on a poured concrete slab sloping down from the entrance on James Madison Parkway towards the back of the lot. There is a raised boiler room below the rear portion of the school. The building is vernacular with International Style influences. The layout is an L-shaped plan with the two-story auditorium-gymnasium running parallel to the road and classrooms placed on both sides of the main hallway running perpendicular to the road. The exterior retains most of its original materials. A majority of the interior is covered in modern wood paneling, dropped ceiling tiles, and industrial carpet; many original materials remain underneath. There is a 1957 addition on the back of the school. In 1960, a separate industrial arts shop building was constructed to the south of the school. The Ralph Bunche High School closed in 1968 but has been used since for city and county administrative offices and storage.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Ralph Bunche High School sits on a 7.8 acre site, which is part of a larger mostly wooded 33.9 acre site owned by the School Board of King George County, Virginia. The school was designed by Samuel N. Mayo and constructed by Howard-Mitchell Construction Company, both of Richmond. The sloping school site is rural and directly abuts Route 301; its entrance is marked by a pair of brick piers. There is a gravel parking lot located between the highway and the Ralph Bunche High School and a gravel drive surrounding the school (Photo 1). The building is located at the southwest corner of the site and faces northeast. Limited portions of the sidewalk and foundation for the King George County Training School, constructed in 1916 and demolished circa 1970, sit to the north of the Ralph Bunche High School building (Photo 2). To the southeast is a circa 1960 concrete block industrial arts shop building. The original King George County Training School is a single-story building with a boiler

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room located underneath in the cavity created by the sloping terrain. The building is constructed of running brick bond masonry over cinderblock construction, with steel frame windows and cast stone sills and detailing. The original roof was asphalt; however it was replaced with a membrane roof circa 2000. The roof was edged with a wood cornice and copper gutters and downspouts; the gutters and downspouts were replaced with aluminum and aluminum flashing now covers most of the cornice (Photo 3). The original five-bay facade is relatively unadorned; however, the front entrance is detailed with the original mosaic granite aggregate door surround with a wood transom and modern double-leaf aluminum frame doors. The original four-over-four single-hung sash windows also remain on the facade. A 1957 addition, stepped back from the original building, extends to the southeast of the facade (Photo 2).

The northwest elevation, facing Route 301, contains the primary entrance to the gymnasium-auditorium and is highlighted by an elevated roofline. The entry door and surround are detailed in the same manner as the front entrance; however, the original wooden six-panel double doors remain. Above the doors is a cast stone panel inscribed with: "Ralph Bunche High School 1949" (Photo 4). The remaining windows in the gymnasium-auditorium are paired six-over-three (Photo 3); however some windows were enclosed with brick after the school closed in 1968, but the cast stone sills were retained (Photo 5).

The southwest elevation (rear) is utilitarian in character. Minimal detailing includes the original four-over-four windows in all areas except the bathrooms, which retain their original paired six-over-three windows. The original subterranean entrance to the boiler room is also located on this elevation and is characterized by a shed roof addition with six-over-three windows and a modern door. A prominent chimney, which serviced the boiler room, is centered on the southwest elevation. The boiler is no longer in use as the building is now serviced by forced air heat. The 1957 addition is visible to the east, protruding forward from the original school (Photo 6).

The original southeast elevation has been obscured by the 1957 addition (Photo 7); however the original exterior wall is visible from within the addition. The entrance on the southeast elevation consisted of brick detailing in the door surround and double-leaf six-pane-over-two- panel doors were surmounted by a four-pane transom window. It appears that the original

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double-leaf door in this location was reused in the 1957 addition on the northeast elevation secondary entrance. The interior of the building has been altered more substantially than the exterior. The floor plan of the building is L-shaped. From the main entrance, the gymnasium-auditorium extends southwest forming one branch of the 'L'. This section of the building contains the gymnasium-auditorium, a storage room, stage, and dressing rooms which were added behind the stage at the end of construction. The gymnasium, while heavily worn and damaged in some areas, still has almost all of its original details: painted cinderblock walls; scoreboard (Photo 8); plywood basketball backboards, but no hoops; maple floor with some painted stripes still visible; the plaster and wood trimmed Proscenium arch framing the stage (Photo 9); and the original six-over-three windows with the operating mechanism still intact (Photo 10).²

A central hall flanked by classrooms extends to the southeast forming the other branch of the 'L', and this section is limited to classrooms, many of which have been subdivided, restrooms, and the boiler room. The original color scheme for the interior, little of which is in evidence now, was a palette of pastel shades.³ Interior walls were finished with smooth plaster; hallways received tile wainscot over cinderblock. Some walls are now clad in modern wood paneling. The floors, which were 9-inch-square asphalt tile over concrete slab, are now covered by industrial carpet. The ceilings were finished with 12-inch-square acoustical tile adhered directly to the plaster ceiling, but dropped acoustical ceiling tile with fluorescent lights has subsequently been installed (Photo 11). Many of the original details such as blackboards and built-in shelves have been removed or covered by modern materials. However, as with the exterior, the interior fixtures of the original steel and glass windows are largely intact. Many of the original nine-pane wood doors with their original knobs are also still in place (Photo 12). The bathrooms have virtually all of the original features: red glazed floor tiles; porcelain sinks, toilets, and urinals; Virginia Alberene Stone toilet partitions, except in the boys bathrooms where they were changed to wood; and tile wainscot (Photo 13).

By 1957 the student body had expanded enough to warrant an addition to the original Ralph Bunche High School building. John J. Ballentine, Jr., an architect from Fredericksburg, was hired to design the addition which consisted primarily of classrooms, a kitchen, and a cafeteria. The exterior repeated the running brick pattern over cinderblock of the original building and included similar door types but eliminated the more costly mosaic door surround material. The cast stone sills were repeated, but the builders changed to aluminum frame

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jalousie windows from the earlier steel frame types. The roof of the addition was metal instead of asphalt and has window air conditioning units instead of a central system (Photo 14). The new addition became the new southeast elevation of the building with a large doorway opening from the cafeteria area directly onto what had become the athletic fields providing easy access for students during physical education or recess (Photo 8).

The interior of the addition is quite similar to the original building; however, it was finished with cheaper, simpler materials. The addition extends to the southeast but has a hall crossing in a northeast direction, which serves as the connection point between the old and new sections of the building. There is an interesting transition point from the old to the new sections of the school where the old brick southeast exterior wall is now a painted interior wall (Photo 15), and the original door frame and transom remain. The floor plan is characterized by a central hallway flanked by four classrooms and offices (Photo 16). The door frames are steel instead of wood, the transoms have chicken wire glass, and the interior window sills are slate. To access the new kitchen and cafeteria, located in a basement area below, an interior stairway was created with the addition. And, again, the exit doors and framing were chosen to emulate the appearance of the original school building including four-pane transoms (Photo 17). As with the original building, the ceilings in the addition have dropped acoustical tile, fluorescent lighting, divided classrooms, and industrial carpet, though some rooms have asbestos flooring (Photo 18). There is at least one full, undivided classroom, albeit with significantly altered detailing in the addition (Photo 19). The basement kitchen and cafeteria have none of the original equipment. Furthermore, the character of the basic cinderblock rooms and poured concrete floor has been altered by fluorescent lighting and dividing walls, and they now have modern equipment stored there (Photo 20).

The most modern building is the industrial arts shop, or Vocational Building, which was constructed in 1960. This building has noteworthy features and construction details but is not a contributing resource. The building served purposes such as the Future Farmers of America and "shop" courses. Like the 1957 addition, it has concrete floors, cinderblock walls, and jalousie windows. The roof is built up asphalt and the ceiling consists of exposed timber framing (Photo 21). There is a loft at the front which rests over two offices below. Like the main school buildings, the vocational offices have dropped acoustical tile ceilings, fluorescent lighting, modern wood paneling, and dividing walls have been added (Photo 22).

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The rear has a garage bay, large exit door, and ramp. The original wood and glass garage door was replaced with a metal garage door circa 1990, and the two rear windows have been

enclosed with brick (Photo 23). While the Ralph Bunche High School closed in 1968, the building served as King George County's first public kindergarten during the 1970s. Since the closing of the kindergarten, the Ralph Bunche High School building has continued to serve the King George County community for the past thirty-nine years as a vocational school, offices for law enforcement, and a facility for the King George County school superintendent's office. The exterior has had few alterations and none of them significant or irreversible. The interior has seen substantial change to floors, ceilings, and walls, but the vast majority of it is cosmetic (carpets, dropped ceilings, paneling, paint) and easily restored. Most of the interior and exterior original appearance and character is still viable at the Ralph Bunche High School from the grand gymnasium entrance, to the almost untouched and finely finished bathrooms, to the completely undeveloped original school site, to the worn but almost completely intact gymnasium-auditorium. While the school is not distinguished architecturally, the physical building coupled with the vitally important social history, results in an incredibly valuable resource.

The Ralph Bunche Alumni Association is currently planning to rehabilitate the building using the Virginia and Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Programs. The Ralph Bunche High School has been an important piece of history since 1949, not only for King George County, but also for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

ENDNOTES

¹ Copies of most of the original architectural drawings for the Mayo designed Ralph Bunche High School and the Ballentine designed 1957 addition are held at the Virginia Department of Education and proved a valuable resource.

² Samuel N. Mayo, A.I.A., "Specifications for Additional Building for King George Training School at Edgehill, King George County, Virginia, Plan no. 4819, January 28, 1949, p. 14, 24. The vast majority of the technical building information for the Ralph Bunche High School cited in this nomination comes from this source.

³ "New King George Negro School Dedicated, Might Mark Finish to Equalization Fight," The Free Lance-Star, September 3, 1949, p. 1.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Ralph Bunche High School, located in King George County a few miles east of Fredericksburg, is significant under Criterion A, as its construction was the direct result of the 1947 Federal District court case, *Margaret Smith, et al v. School Board of King George County, Virginia, et al*, Richmond Civil Action No. 631. The school was constructed in 1949 as part of one of the first cases in a series of legal battles between African-American communities and local governments over the issue of “equalization” of white and Negro school systems in the Commonwealth of Virginia. King George County was one of a small group of test cases, including Gloucester and Surry Counties, filed by the Richmond African-American law firm of Hill, Martin and Robinson in association with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The school was named for Dr. Ralph Bunche, a nationally renowned African-American figure who served as the United Nations mediator for Palestine during the nineteen forties. The school’s construction was funded by a bond backed by an increase in King George County residents’ property taxes. The Ralph Bunche High School served the African-American high school students of King George County from its inception in 1949 until closing in 1968 when the King George County school system was fully integrated. The nomination is therefore also significant under Criterion Consideration G with a period of significance of 1947-1968.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The significance of the Ralph Bunche High School, constructed as a result of the Federal District court case *Margaret Smith, et al v. School Board of King George County, Virginia, et al*, Richmond Civil Action No. 631, rests in its unique role as part of the early fight against the “separate but equal” doctrine established by the Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896). While the infamous phrase most associated with the decision does not actually appear in it, *Plessy v. Ferguson* did result in a policy which supported the right of states to create racially separate facilities, so long as they were equal.

The Supreme Court ruled that the states could do this and not violate the “equal protection of the law” established by the Fourteenth Amendment. The reality was a system of segregation with separate facilities that were virtually never equal. Before the overturning of *Plessy v. Ferguson* by *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), there were efforts across the nation to have “equalization” of facilities in an effort to both live up to the intent of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and to begin a fight to overturn segregation

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altogether. *Margaret Smith, an infant, etc., et al, v. School Board of King George County, Virginia, et al*, Richmond Civil Action No. 631 was one of these efforts, and one of the earliest attempts to challenge the “separate but equal” school system in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The original King George Training School, simply called the Training School within the county, was built in 1916 and consisted of four clapboard buildings, of which traces of the foundations remain today. The inadequacies of this school, as compared to the white King George High School, were the focus of the complaints in the suit which led to the construction of the Ralph Bunche High School on the same site. The King George High School, often called just King George, had “running water, modern toilet facilities, a central heating plant, a comparatively modern cafeteria and a gymnasium,” while the Training School had “outside toilets, a cafeteria greatly inferior to the one at King George, no gymnasium and...” the rooms were “heated by stoves.”⁴ There were also numerous differences in equipment, books, courses offered, and teacher pay which were addressed directly or indirectly in the lawsuit. Cases such as the NAACP inspired *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada*, 305 U.S. 337 (1938) had already clearly established that states cannot discriminate against their citizens on the basis of race in the field of education. The obvious next step for the opponents of segregation in King George County was to address the inequalities present at King George Training School with the short term goal of “equalization” and the long term goal of desegregation.

As with many other civil rights cases, the case against the School Board of King George County was guided and supported by the NAACP. W. Lester Banks, executive secretary of the Virginia State Conference of the NAACP, steered much of the organization’s efforts in this case and Martin A. Martin, of the Richmond African-American law firm of Hill, Martin and Robinson, was hired to lead the case. Another member of this firm, Oliver W. Hill, was elected to the Richmond City Council just before this case began. Hill was the first African-American elected to a city council position in the state of Virginia,⁵ adding to the rich history surrounding this case.

Civil Action 631 commenced with the February 13, 1947 subpoena of T. Benton Gayle, Division Superintendent of Schools for King George County and Clerk of School Board of King George County, Fredericksburg, Virginia to appear in Richmond at the District Court of the United States for the Eastern District of Virginia on March 3, 1947. According to the

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subpoena Superintendent Gayle was also required to bring copies of all of the following documents dating as far back as 1930: minutes of school board meetings; copies of teacher and staff contracts; schedules, scales, records, rosters and studies of all salaries; records of all teacher qualifications and experience; schedule of all capital outlays for white and Negro schools; and the number of buses in operation for white and Negro schools. The information revealed in these documents would form the main body of evidence supporting the claims of the plaintiffs in this case. Judge Sterling Hutcheson presided over this case while C. O'Connor Goolrick, the mayor of Fredericksburg, was the Special Counsel for the King George School Board.

On March 30, 1948, Judge Hutcheson issued an order of "equalization" for Surry County schools based upon an agreement reached by both sides in the dispute. This case was never "argued on its merits" but rather a consenting decision by the plaintiffs and the school board after discussion with the judge regarding his probable ruling. Surry County was given until September 15, 1948 to report to the court how they would solve the issues of inequality. The issues addressed in Surry County were largely the same as those in the pending King George County case and would set the tone for that decision--accredited schools for Negro students as well as whites, equality of buildings and equipment, bus transportation for all students, equal pay for teachers and staff, and comparable courses for all schools. The case in King George County however, along with other cases in Chesterfield and Gloucester counties, was "argued on its merits" and would result in a judgment and court order.⁶

Judge Hutcheson found the high schools in King George County to be unequal on April 8, 1948, leaving the school board with an impending court order for equalization.

Superintendent Gayle and the King George County School Board attempted to find a solution before the final court order arrived. Eventually in July of 1948 a plan was put forward by King George County, the City of Fredericksburg and Stafford County "to construct a consolidated school for their Negro high school pupils" near Fredericksburg. The African-American residents of King George County made known their opposition to the twenty-five mile commute to the proposed high school site as a further example of discrimination.⁷ The proposal of "consolidation" would be considered periodically over the

following few months but never pursued. King George County finally received Judge Hutcheson's order for "equalization" on July 31, 1948 with its various injunctions for

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change and improvement of King George Training School effective immediately. King George County schools would open on September 8, 1948, making them the first school in Virginia to have to actually answer to the Federal District Court orders. Along with consolidation, numerous other options were considered to meet the obligations of the court including improvements to the existing Negro school facilities in time for the fall 1948 semester, closing both white and Negro schools until they could be equalized, or even desegregating the school system.⁸ The King George County Board of Supervisors also tried to shift the burden to the Commonwealth of Virginia by adopting a resolution calling on Governor William M. Tuck and the General Assembly to levy a sales tax to raise \$10 million for capital expenditures "in order that a uniform school system may be maintained throughout Virginia." The Board of Supervisors claimed the funding was not available in King George County to meet the demands of the Federal District Court order.⁹

As September 8, 1948 approached, Attorney Martin made clear the position he and his clients would take on the opening day of school. "They have made some improvements...but facilities certainly are not equal." Martin offered only one solution if the schools had not been equalized: "the only thing I can see is that they have to let those children into the white schools." As for the school officials and their fate, Martin declared that "we will have to ask the judge to hold the school people in contempt of the court." Superintendent Gayle claimed that the short time frame of the court order left the county little time to comply but that improvements had been made at the Training School.¹⁰

Wednesday September 8, 1948 witnessed a flurry of activity at the King George Training School. The day started with an inspection by a contingent headed by Attorney Martin, W. Lester Banks of the NAACP, and J. Rupert Picott, executive secretary of the Virginia Teachers Association, as well as other local leaders of the African-American community. Following the morning inspection, attorneys Martin and Spottswood W. Robinson III advised their clients not to register at the Training School because the improvements were "wholly inadequate." The students were told to return to the Training School the next morning where everyone on both sides expected them to travel to King George High School and attempt to register.¹¹ Martin highlighted some of the worst results of the inspection including 2,000 books "dumped" at the Training School with most being "worse than useless" obscure foreign texts, training manuals, or catalogues. Martin also scoffed at the poor or nonexistent equipment in the "so-called" laboratory.¹² Other improvements sought, which had not been completed, included indoor plumbing, a central heating system, and a gymnasium.

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The following day, Thursday September 9, 1948, ten students from the King George Training School, accompanied by Attorney Martin and a number of reporters, attempted to attend classes at King George High School on the basis that the facilities at the Training School were inadequate and unequal. The students waited outside while Superintendent Gayle and Attorney Martin held a tense meeting inside King George. After demanding to know Martin's purpose, Gayle asked, "Are you familiar with the Constitution of Virginia, Section 140, which states that Negroes and whites shall be taught in separate schools?" When Martin answered that he was familiar with Virginia law, Gayle demanded of Martin "Do you realize you are asking me to violate the oath of my office to uphold the State Constitution and the State laws?" Martin argued that "It appears to me that the laws of Virginia in the particular are contrary to the Constitution and laws of the United States." Gayle, described as reddening in the face, declared "That is only your opinion." Gayle went on to state that he "expected you people to be reasonable on this...we did not receive the court order until August 5...we've done everything we could in that short time." Martin fired back that "You knew and I knew what the order was going to be...you should have prepared for it..."¹³ While the end result was known by all in advance, the attempt to register at the white school was necessary to claim that all options were tried and that a contempt of court motion was warranted.

Reactions of some local white citizens of King George County revealed the anger, frustration, and prejudice which was prevalent among many residents. When the reporters left King George, after the meeting between Gayle and Martin, they were met by a confrontational crowd. "Why pick on this county?" asked one woman, heatedly." "There are plenty of other counties where the niggers are much worse off—you outsiders are just stirring this up." Another woman declared, "That old rascal Abe Lincoln is the cause of all this...he should have died before he was born! Him and his emancipation."¹⁴ Governor Tuck also weighed in on the controversy, clearly favoring the side of King George County officials and segregation. Tuck asked for "utmost calmness and tolerance" but also criticized the "unfortunate agitation of the racial issue." He also stated that "certain persons posing as leaders of the Negro race have shocked many people in Virginia by advocating and urging the violation of the Constitution of our Commonwealth...segregation of the races has been observed throughout the history of our Commonwealth and will continue to be observed." Demonstrating resistance to compromise or fairness, Tuck opined that

"an expanded program of public buildings at this time would only serve to complicate and

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make worse an already bad situation...there is no such thing as absolute equality in the schools.” Finally, showing the real prejudice many in this conflict had to overcome, the governor of Virginia stated that “the advocates of the so-called ‘civil rights’ program sponsored by President Truman will not force upon the people of Virginia this curse of nonsegregation...the hundreds of thousands of law-abiding and peace-loving Negroes of Virginia deserve better guidance from their own race.”¹⁵ A local King George resident named M.T. Hartsoe even wrote an open letter “To the Colored People of King George County,” which stated that “the white people of King George are your best friends. They know you better than any outsiders who may have some objective which may not be apparent yet...don’t let the Russians lead you into a position which may be fatal...go to your white friends and ask for their help—in the right way.”¹⁶ Emotions were frayed on all sides of this conflict as society as a whole was undergoing a tremendous change. The reference to the Russians reveals another facet of paranoia of the day with McCarthyism on the rise.

Another front was opened in the legal fight against discrimination in King George County on September 10, 1948. Attorney Martin announced that he was filing a new suit against the King George County school system challenging the unequal pay between white and Negro teachers. This was in direct response to a decision by school officials two days earlier to make the principal and several teachers at the Training School “assistants” to their counterparts at King George. Attorney Martin stated that this “reprisal” represented direct discrimination and warranted the new suit being filed as well as a request to find the King George County school officials in contempt. In the original lawsuit regarding “equalization” the issue of teacher pay had been addressed on the basis of lower pay equaling higher turnover and thus lower quality teachers for the Training School.¹⁷

These actions resulted in an order by Judge Hutcheson for the King George County superintendent and school board to appear in court on October 22, 1948 and “show cause” why they should not be found in contempt and punished accordingly. In addition to previous inadequacies at the Training School which had not been rectified, Judge Hutcheson was responding particularly to a petition which had appeared in King George County since his July 31 injunction. This petition demanded that the plaintiffs renounce all links to the NAACP and their current attorneys before the defendants will move to have a bond referendum to fund

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a new Negro school. This action was categorized as “further evidence of defendants’

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malicious and contumacious conduct and attitude.”

Faced with being charged contempt on their October 22 hearing, Superintendent Gayle and school board members initiated a petition requesting that Judge Leon M. Bazile call for a special election for a \$150,000 bond to fund a new Negro high school which would be “substantially equal” to the current white high school. King George County school officials wanted the petition in hand when they met with Judge Hutcheson in order to mitigate the charge of contempt.¹⁸ The petition received more than the minimum third of qualified voters’ signatures, and Judge Bazile ordered that the special election take place on November 6, 1948. There was also a “mass meeting” of all citizens called for November 1, 1948 at King George High School to present information and hold discussions regarding the bond issue. Faced with some progress by the defendants, Judge Hutcheson ordered the hearing on contempt charges continued until November 5, 1948. At that time the defendants’ attorneys were required to submit a brief answering the plaintiffs’ charges, specifically two primary issues: (1) a comparison of courses and equipment for the current school year and (2) what has been done to equalize the Training School and King George High School?¹⁹

So important had the bond issue become for Superintendent Gayle, that he sent an article to the local King George News outlining the issues which had been discussed at the earlier county meeting attended by over four hundred King George residents. Gayle’s clear goal was to rally support for the upcoming bond election and justify the costs. Gayle argued that the \$150,000 estimate was in line with current school construction costs and that it was needed if equalization was to be achieved. Gayle then outlined the various details of the project expenditures including acquisition of land, number of classrooms, equipment, engineering, etc. Finally Gayle tackled the thorniest issue: increased property taxes to pay for the bond. Gayle compared the resulting tax rate of \$2.40/\$100 of assessed valuation of property as comparable to surrounding communities and a fair price to pay to eliminate the charges of discrimination against King George County. Gayle ended with a back handed endorsement of the bond issue by stating that “while few of us appreciate the methods which have been followed by some of the Negro leaders...we are forced to admit that the Negro School Plant is not equal to that of the white schools and must be improved.”²⁰

The November 6, 1948 bond referendum passed 353 to 245 resulting in full funding for the new
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Negro school. Plans to acquire land and hire an architect were begun immediately. Low

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Negro voter turnout for the bond election sparked some criticism including a comment from Superintendent Gayle: "If they won't vote for a better school themselves, how do they expect us to improve conditions?" Another hoped for result of the successful referendum was a continuance of contempt charges for King George County school officials.²¹

The passage of the school bond resulted in several positive steps towards ending the conflict. First, a number of courses at the white high school, which had been dropped to equalize with the Negro high school, were restored. Attorney Martin stated that "provided the agreement which we reached yesterday is consented to by the school board we will raise no objection to the board's restoration of any courses in white school.[sic]" Superintendent Gayle also rescinded the order placing King George teachers and administrators over their counterparts at the Training School. The plaintiffs' attorneys also agreed to "take no further action" until the new Negro high school building was constructed. Finally, in a gesture of amicability, Attorney Hill stated that so long as the school board met their obligations he and the other attorneys had no desire to see them cited for contempt.²²

A legal issue which dogged this process from the outset was the fact that Judge Hutcheson could not order specific solutions for King George County but only general goals of "equalization." Attorney Hill stated that "Judge Hutcheson was very careful to point out that he will judge this case on its merits at the proper time, and that he does not consider that he has the authority to point out the means by which the equalization may be made."²³ This precedent was firmly established (*Mills v. Board of Education of Anne Arundel County*, 311 U.S. 693 (1940)) and tied the hands of the judge regarding specificity. Judge Hutcheson could only rule on educational opportunity using the evidence provided.²⁴

This court case was not just important for King George County and the Commonwealth of Virginia but the entire United States and the national fight over segregation. After the passing of the bond issue and Judge Hutcheson's ruling, an NAACP spokesman stated the next test will be "does the new equal, but segregated school plant afford equal educational opportunity?"

The NAACP doubts, in advance, that it will." The NAACP Washington representative, Leslie Perry, went even further and claimed that "Our eventual aim is to eliminate segregation in the schools." Perry went on to say that Virginia and the "Upper South" were targeted by the NAACP as the easier starting point for their campaign of desegregation, but that eventually

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their efforts would spread across the entire South. Local King George County residents

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clearly understood the larger goals and issues at hand and bitterly opposed them. Reverend Floyd Cartwright, rector of four white Episcopal churches in King George County, stated that “the Negroes don’t want a school of their own, they want to get into the white school.”

Revealing the extent of local prejudices that supported the system of segregation, Reverend Cartwright expanded his thoughts by claiming that “the white people here still feel they (the Negroes) are an inferior race, that they have no right to demand equalization and that they can’t use equal facilities.”²⁵ Enough state and local leaders saw the issue differently to allow change to be realized.

With the legal fight largely at an end, the process of actually building a Negro high school began in King George County. On Saturday April 28, 1949 the contract for constructing the new King George Training School was awarded to Howard-Mitchell Construction Co. for a bid of \$96, 856.00. The heating system contract was awarded to Robert B. Payne for a bid of \$19, 996.09. Both contractors committed to completing the work within 150 days, so the school would be ready for the 1949-50 school year.²⁶ The architect was Samuel N. Mayo, who practiced in Richmond from 1940-55.²⁷

Demonstrating the improvement of relations since the court fight had concluded, the King George County School Board suggested changing the name of Training School, because of the title’s negative connotations since it was often used for schools for delinquents. “Training school” was also a common name for Negro schools during the period of segregation. Superintendent Gayle suggested the new name: Ralph Bunche High School. Considering the outstanding reputation of Dr. Bunche, and the fact that he was one of the most famous African-Americans of the day, the local African-American residents, school officials, and the law firm of Hill, Martin and Robinson all approved.²⁸

Ralph Johnson Bunche was born August 7, 1904 in Detroit, Michigan. Bunche eventually earned a doctorate in political science from Harvard University. Dr. Bunche’s greatest claim-to-fame was his service as United Nations mediator on Palestine between the Arabs and Israelis. Dr. Bunche helped negotiate an armistice between the two sides in 1949 and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950.²⁹

Dr. Bunche was invited to attend the September 2, 1949 dedication of the new high school
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but was unable to attend. The new Ralph Bunche High School offered a science laboratory and commercial classroom, a library, three classrooms, a clinic room, an auditorium-

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gymnasium with two dressing rooms, storage rooms, rest rooms, and a principal's office. Superintendent Gayle declared that "in most respects the new addition is far superior to the physical facilities offered at King George High School." In addition Gayle stated that "every effort has been made to bring courses of study as nearly as possible identical in the two schools." Seemingly the new Ralph Bunche High School met all of the requirements of equalization. But many were already wondering whether or not this truly represented equality.³⁰

The dedication ceremony for Ralph Bunche High School was a celebration for the entire African-American community of King George County, and also a reminder of the work for change that still lay ahead. In attendance were numerous local and regional figures including Superintendent Gayle, two of the three school board members, the attorneys for both sides, as well as many local officials and residents. The keynote speaker, Hampton Institute president Dr. Alonzo G. Moron, complimented the "graciousness with which the mandate of the court was carried out," and that apparently the fight over equalization had "left no traces of bitterness." On another note, Dr. Moron, while praising Dr. Ralph Bunche, also lamented that "we should hang our heads in shame that this man, despite his achievements abroad and the formal evidence throughout the world, is still a second-class citizen in his native land." J. Rupert Picott of the Virginia Teachers Association issued a statement for himself, Attorney Martin A. Martin and W. Lester Banks of the NAACP: "After a casual observation and tour of the facilities it appears that real and substantial progress has been made in complying with the court's order." Picott also expressed hope to soon "join with the school board in a motion to Judge Hutcheson to dismiss all proceedings in this case." Attorney Martin declared that it was "the happiest visit I have ever made to your county. It appears to me that you have a fine tool here with which your children will be freed from those chains (of ignorance)." Finally, a 500 word telegram from Dr. Ralph Bunche himself was read to those in attendance. Among other remarks Dr. Bunche stated that "I hope that every Negro boy and girl of high school age in King George County will enroll in this new school. Each boy and girl has an obligation to do so, an obligation to his race and his country." Highlighting as yet unresolved social conflict, Dr. Bunche declared that "I would be very happy indeed if this new school were for youth of all races and colors...keep striving relentlessly toward the goal of unabridged American citizenship and

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full equality."³¹

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The immediate legal result of the completion and dedication of Ralph Bunche High School was the end of charges against the King George County Superintendent and School Board.

On September 13, 1949, the attorneys for the plaintiffs joined the attorneys for the defendants in a motion that Federal Judge Sterling Hutcheson dismiss the charge of contempt. Officials on both sides praised the "good will" and "amicable understanding" that had been reached by the case's end.³² On September 16, 1949 Judge Hutcheson formally dismissed the equalization lawsuit ending the long and difficult fight for equalization in King George County.

During an interview on December 29, 1975 former King George County School Superintendent T. Benton Gayle reminisced and mused over his life, including the events surrounding the fight over equalization and the construction of Ralph Bunche High School.

The interviewers were John Hunter and Wes Meyers of the Lewis Egerton Smoot Memorial Library in King George County.³³ Mr. Gayle argued that the Board of Supervisors made a mistake in 1939 by not applying for a Roosevelt Administration grant for 45% of the cost and constructing a school for the colored children in the county. Gayle says he was opposed by the board on this goal and that it might well have prevented the 1947-49 conflict over equalization in King George County. In addition, the cost of school construction greatly increased in those few years resulting in a much larger capital expenditure for King George County when they finally did build a Negro school. Gayle also stated that during his superintendency integration was accepted and achieved without trouble beginning in the fall of 1963. In the end the dream of Dr. Bunche was realized as the Ralph Bunche High School building was utilized for a fully integrated public kindergarten in the 1970s.

From its construction in 1949 to its closing in 1968, the Ralph Bunche High School served the African-American community of King George County. In 1957 a rear addition was constructed to expand the number of classrooms in the main building as the old clapboard King

George Training School buildings were eventually to be demolished. In 1960 a separate arts annex was built behind the main school. With the complete integration of King George County Schools, the Ralph Bunche High School was closed in 1968, though the building has continued to serve the King George County community ever since. Currently there is an effort by the Ralph Bunche Alumni Association to preserve the school.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ "Current Trends and Events of National Importance in Negro Education: Section A. *Three Virginia Public School Cases*," The Journal of Negro Education, vol. XVIII, no.2, Washington, D.C.: The Howard University Press, 1949, p.176.
- ² Marder, Murrey, "Virginians Face School Segregation Showdown," The Washington Post, September 5, 1948, p.8.
- ³ "Court Orders Surry Schools Be Equalized," Richmond Times-Dispatch, March 31, 1948, p.1, 3.
- ⁴ "Consolidated Negro School Awaits King George Action," The Free Lance-Star, July 10, 1948, p.1.
- ⁵ "King George Handed Final School Order," The Free Lance-Star, July 31, 1948, p.1.
- ⁶ "King George Board Asks Special Session, Sales Tax," The Free Lance-Star, September 3, 1948, p.2.
- ⁷ Marder, Murrey, "Virginians Face School Segregation Showdown," p.1, 8.
- ⁸ Foster, Bill, "Additions Rejected by Probers," The Richmond News Leader, September 8, 1948, p.1.
- ⁹ "School Test is Indicated by Negroes," Richmond Times-Dispatch, September 9, 1948, p.1, 6.
- ¹⁰ Marder, Murrey, "10 King George Negro Pupils Barred from White School," The Washington Post, September 10, 1948, p.1, B-1.
- ¹¹ Marder, Murrey, "10 King George Negro Pupils Barred from White School," p.B-1.
- ¹² "Tuck Urges Calm, Tolerant Handling of School Problem," The King George News, September 16, 1948, p.1, 10.
- ¹³ "To the Colored People of King George County," The King George News, September 16, 1948, p.10.
- ¹⁴ "Negroes Plan New King George Suit," The Free Lance-Star, September 10, 1948, p.1.
- ¹⁵ "Petition Asks School Board Election," The King George News, October 21, 1948, p.1.
- ¹⁶ "Nov.6 Set For Bond Issue Vote," "Mass Meeting to be Held on Bond Issue," "School Hearing Set For Nov.5," The King George News, October 28, 1948, p.1.
- ¹⁷ Gayle, T. Benton, "Gayle Explains Need For County School Bond Issue," The King George News, November 4, 1948, p.1, 8.
- ¹⁸ "Bond Issue Passes 353-245 For New School," The King George News, November 11, 1948, p.1, 7.
- ¹⁹ "All Courses Restored at King George High," The King George News, November 18, 1948, p.1, 5.
- ²⁰ "All Courses Restored at King George High," p. 5.
- ²¹ "Current Trends and Events of National Importance in Negro Education: Section A. *Three Virginia Public School Cases*," p.177.
- ²² Eleazer, Frank, "Virginia Negroes Battle For Equal School Rights," New York World Telegram, November 22, 1948, p.1.
- ²³ "K.G. School Construction Bids Awarded," The King George News, March 3, 1949, p.1.
- ²⁴ Wells, John E. and Robert E. Dalton, The Virginia Architects, 1835-1955, Richmond, Virginia: New South Architectural Press, 1997, p.281.
- ²⁵ "School Honors Ralph Bunche," The King George News, June 2, 1949, p.1.
- ²⁶ <http://nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/1950/bunche-bio.html>
- ²⁷ "Dedication Friday For Negro School," The Free Lance-Star, August 31, 1949, p.2.
- ²⁸ "New King George Negro School Dedicated, Might Mark Finish to Equalization Fight," The Free Lance-Star, September 3, 1949, p.1-2.
- ²⁹ "Charge Against Local Officials to be Dismissed," The King George News, September 15, 1949, p.1.
- ³⁰ Lewis Egerton Smoot Memorial Library interview with Mr. T. Benton Gayle, December 29, 1975, p.1, 17-19.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated boundaries include all of the land historically associated with the Ralph Bunche High School as shown in King George County Plat Book 5, Page 22. Attached is the "Boundary Survey of the Property of The School Board of King George County, Virginia" dated October 28, 1994. The nominated boundaries are the 7.8 acres including tracts 1, 2, 3, and 4 which surround the original and current school locations.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property includes the entire acreage historically associated with the Ralph Bunche High School.

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PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are of:
RALPH BUNCHE HIGH SCHOOL

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Location: Edgehill, King George County, Virginia
VDHR File Number: 048-5007
Date of photograph: August 2005
Photographers: Marcus R. Pollard, Paige L.W. Pollard

All negatives are stored at the Department of Historic Resources unless otherwise noted.

SUBJECT: View of front/side of school and setting; street elevation (gymnasium entrance)
VIEW: Facing southeast
NEG. NO.: 22416:35
PHOTO 1 of 23

SUBJECT: View of front elevation of school and setting
VIEW: Facing southwest
NEG. NO.: 22416:25
PHOTO 2 of 23

SUBJECT: View of rear of school; exterior of gymnasium
VIEW: Facing northwest
NEG. NO.: 22416: 30
PHOTO 3 of 23

SUBJECT: View of gymnasium entrance
VIEW: Facing southeast
NEG. NO.: 22416:34
PHOTO 4 of 23

SUBJECT: View of rear of gymnasium and gymnasium addition (exterior)
VIEW: Facing northeast
NEG. NO.: 22416: 33
PHOTO 5 of 23

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SUBJECT: View of rear of school with part of 1957 addition
VIEW: Facing northeast
NEG. NO.: 22416: 31
PHOTO 6 of 23

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SUBJECT: View of side of school, 1957 addition
VIEW: Facing northwest
NEG. NO.: 22416: 26
PHOTO 7 of 23

SUBJECT: Detail of scoreboard in gym
VIEW: Facing northeast
NEG. NO.: 22416:8
PHOTO 8 of 23

SUBJECT: Gymnasium/auditorium looking towards stage
VIEW: Facing south
NEG. NO.: 22416:7
PHOTO 9 of 23

SUBJECT: Detail of gym windows with operating winch
VIEW: Facing southeast
NEG. NO.: 22416:4
PHOTO 10 of 23

SUBJECT: Typical classroom in original school
VIEW: Facing Southwest
NEG. NO.: 22416:22
PHOTO 11 of 23

SUBJECT: Typical classroom and original door
VIEW: Facing north
NEG. NO.: 22416:23
PHOTO 12 of 23

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SUBJECT: View of girls' bathroom
VIEW: Facing southwest
NEG. NO.: 22416:12
PHOTO 13 of 23

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SUBJECT: View of 1957 addition and setting
VIEW: Facing northeast
NEG. NO.: 22416:28
PHOTO 14 of 23

SUBJECT: Detail of new front entrance between original school and 1957 addition (connector)
VIEW: Facing northeast
NEG. NO.: 22416:20
PHOTO 15 of 23

SUBJECT: View of main hallway in 1957 addition
VIEW: Facing southeast
NEG. NO.: 22416:18
PHOTO 16 of 23

SUBJECT: Detail of new back entrance between original school and 1957 addition
VIEW: Facing southwest
NEG. NO.: 22416:19
PHOTO 17 of 23

SUBJECT: Typical classroom in original building
VIEW: Facing northeast
NEG. NO.: 22416:17
PHOTO 18 of 23

SUBJECT: Undivided classroom in 1957 addition
VIEW: Facing South
NEG. NO.: 22416:15
PHOTO 19 of 23

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SUBJECT: Hallway in of cafeteria/kitchen; basement of 1957 addition
VIEW: Facing northwest
NEG. NO.: 22416:10
PHOTO 20 of 23

SUBJECT: Interior of 1960 vocational building (Industrial Arts Building)

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VIEW: Facing northwest
NEG. NO.: 22417:35
PHOTO 21 of 23

SUBJECT: Interior of 1960 vocational building divided office (Industrial Arts Building)
VIEW: Facing southeast
NEG. NO.: 22417:36
PHOTO 22 of 23

SUBJECT: Rear of 1960 vocational building and setting (Industrial Arts Building)
VIEW: Facing northwest
NEG. NO.: 22417:33
PHOTO 23 of 23

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¹ Copies of most of the original architectural drawings for the Mayo designed Ralph Bunche High School and the Ballentine designed 1957 addition are held at the Virginia Department of Education and proved a valuable resource.

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² Samuel N. Mayo, A.I.A., "Specifications for Additional Building for King George Training School at Edgehill, King George County, Virginia, Plan no. 4819, January 28, 1949, p. 14, 24. The vast majority of the technical build out information for the Ralph Bunche High School cited in this nomination comes from this source.

³ "New King George Negro School Dedicated, Might Mark Finish to Equalization Fight," The Free Lance-Star, September 3, 1949, p. 1.

⁴ "Current Trends and Events of National Importance in Negro Education: Section A. *Three Virginia Public School Cases*," The Journal of Negro Education, vol. XVIII, no.2, Washington, D.C.: The Howard University Press, 1949, p.176.

⁵ Marder, Murrey, "Virginians Face School Segregation Showdown," The Washington Post, September 5, 1948, p.8.

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